

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: ETRN, TU

SUBJECT: NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL ON DC-10

NEW YORK TIMES, MARCH 23, RAN FOLLOWING EDITORIAL UNDER
CAPTION "FATAL IRRESPONSIBILITY":

BEGIN QUOTE UNITED STATES SAFETY EXPERTS ARE CONVINCED THAT
THE RECENT CRASH NEAR PARIS OF A TURKISH AIRLINES DC-10--
WITH 346 DEATHS, THE WORST DISASTER IN THE HISTORY OF
CIVIL AVIATION--WAS CAUSED BY THE SUCKING OUT OF AN INADE-
QUATELY SECURED REAR CARGO DOOR. IF THAT PROVES THE OFFI-
CIAL FINDING, THIS TRAGEDY COULD AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN
PREVENTED FOR THERE HAD BEEN AMPLE WARNING OF THE DANGER.

IN MARCH, 1972, AN AMERICAN AIRLINES DC-10, FLYING OVER
CANADA, AT ABOUT THE SAME ALTITUDE AS THE TURKISH PLANE
OVER PARIS, HAD ITS REAR CARGO DOOR BLOWN OUT. THIS
RAPIDLY DECOMPRESSED THE CABIN AND COLLAPSED THE FLOOR,
SEVERING THE PLANE'S CONTROL CABLES. FORTUNATELY, THROUGH
THE EXERCISE OF GREAT SKILL BY ITS PILOT, THE LIGHTLY
LOADED PLANE--IT WAS CARRYING ONLY 56 PASSENGERS--MANAGED
TO LAND WITHOUT FATALITIES, THOUGH THE REAR ENGINE WAS
DEAD AND THE RUDDER SNAGGED.

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FOLLOWING THAT NEAR-DISASTER IN CANADA, THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION DRAFTED A REGULATION THAT WOULD HAVE

MADE MANDATORY A MORE SECURE LOCKING SYSTEM FOR THE REAR CARGO DOOR, BUT THE DIRECTIVE WAS NEVER ISSUED. THE DC-10'S MANUFACTURER, MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS, PERSUADED THE THEN F.A.A. ADMINISTRATOR, JOHN H. SHAFFER, TO LET THE COMPANY ISSUE 'SERVICE BULLETINS' TO THE PLANE'S OPERATORS, CALLING ONLY FOR VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE.

MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS ALSO RESISTED RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY THAT IT REDESIGN THE FLOOR OF THE PLANE. THE COMPANY URGED THE F.A.A. TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF FUNDING A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM 'BECAUSE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE EFFORT REQUIRED.'

'WE WILL NOT PLAN ANY FURTHER ACTION...UNTIL WE HEAR FROM YOU,' MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS'S LETTER TO THE F.A.A. CONCLUDED--SIX DAYS BEFORE THE DC-10 NEAR PARIS BLEW OUT ITS REAR DOOR AND TOOK 346 PEOPLE TO THEIR DEATH.

THE LEGAL ISSUE OF CULPABILITY WILL BE FOR THE COURTS TO DECIDE. TECHNICALLY, IT IS TRUE THAT THE F.A.A. COULD NOT ORDER A FOREIGN AIRLINE TO CHANGE THE LOCKING MECHANISM ON A DC-10 THAT IT OWNED AND OPERATED. FOR ITS PART, MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ARGUE THAT IT HAD COMPLIED WITH THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE F.A.A. BY GIVING PRECAUTIONARY NOTICE TO THE PLANE'S USERS AND ALSO THAT IT WAS ENTIRELY WITHIN ITS LEGAL RIGHTS IN RESISTING AN EXPENSIVE REDESIGN.

NEVERTHELESS, THIS WORST CRASH IN COMMERCIAL AIR HISTORY SUGGESTS A SCANDALOUS FAILURE TO PUT SAFETY NEEDS AHEAD OF GO-SLOW, BUSINESS-AS-USUAL CONSIDERATIONS. NOT AN ORIGINAL STORY, BUT A REMARKABLY GHASTLY ONE.

THIS WEEK, IN THE WAKE OF THE TRAGEDY, THE F.A.A. ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD MAKE MANDATORY SEVERAL IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LOCKING SYSTEM OF THE DC-10'S REAR CARGO DOOR. END QUOTE. RUSH
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